

I could say a lot about all the players and the ones who had starring roles in the games and not just the championship game but the other games. I watched several of them on television last year. But I want to say a special word of personal admiration and respect for Coach Bowden.

I have watched him year-in and year-out. I have watched him be gracious in victory and gracious in defeat, which is more difficult. Of course, it's easy if you don't lose very much. [*Laughter*] That makes it a little easier. But I have been immensely impressed by the leadership that he and his team have brought to the young men that have been on this football team, especially this year, but also in past years.

Bobby, I was told that for 24 years you had an empty picture frame on your desk, waiting for an undefeated team, and I'm glad you can finally fill that picture frame. Congratulations to you.

And let me say to all the young men on this team, some of you will play some more football and go on into the pro ranks, and if you do, I wish you well. Most college football players, even on national championship teams, don't go on to play in the pro ranks, and I wish you well, too. What it takes to win on the football team, hard work and discipline and devotion to a common effort, give you pretty good lessons for life. And if you remember what brought you to the national championship, you'll be a champion when you leave Florida State, whether you play any more football, or not.

That is the ultimate lesson, Coach, of the way you run this team. I respect you; I admire you. I congratulate you all. And I thank you for giving the rest of us who just watch from the stands or on television a magnificent season. Thank you very much.

[At this point, Talbot D'Alemberte, president, Florida State University, and Bobby Bowden, coach, Florida State Seminoles, made brief remarks; and Todd Frier presented the President a team jersey.]

**The President.** That's great. I'm going to have to bulk up before I can—[*laughter*]. Well, this is terrific. I want to thank all of you. A lot of people here I see made the trip up from Florida, and I want to welcome

you to the White House and, in closing, just say this: When we have an event like this and we're able to invite people to come in here and express their pride and support for some remarkable achievement, it embodies the motto that the White House is the people's house.

And I think I should tell you that this is not only the first national championship of this new millennium, the first national championship team, but you are coming here in the 200th anniversary of the White House. It was completed in 1800, and John Adams, our second President, was the first person to live here. Every President since then has lived here.

And this house has seen a lot of changes and a lot of things come and go. But the feelings you have today, and I hope the pride you feel as Americans in being here, are what has sustained us now for 200 years. And if we just keep them, a couple hundred years from now, there will be another group of young people here celebrating an athletic achievement. Chances are they'll still be playing football, and the offensive line will average 500 pounds. [*Laughter*]

Thank you very much, and welcome.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:22 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Representatives Corrine Brown and Dan Miller; and Michael Vick, quarterback, Virginia Tech Hokies. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Talbot D'Alemberte, Bobby Bowden, and Todd Frier.

## Interview With Dan Rather of the CBS Evening News

March 2, 2000

### Gun Control Legislation

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, thank you for doing this. You're proposing registering guns like cars. But if you're going to do that, then why not take the next step and regulate guns, as we do cars? After all, if there's something seriously wrong about cars, the Government can regulate automobiles. Are you willing to do that?

**The President.** Well, first of all, I don't think we should minimize the impact that

licensing handgun owners themselves would have. That's what I want to do. And I think it's a very important step. Now, it's tough to pass in this Congress because most of the Republicans agree with the NRA that guns are different, and even though it might save lives, we shouldn't do it. But I think it's very important.

There's a practical problem with the guns, of course. There are over 200 million of them already out there. But I think if we would begin the process of making handgun owners get a license before they can buy a gun, pass a Brady background check, and then have a gun safety course, I think it would make a difference.

I think if we did that, plus had child safety locks, closed the big loophole in the background registration law by covering the gun shows and the urban flea markets, and then continue this technology into safe guns so that as soon as possible we can sell guns and adjust them so that, by fingerprints, they can only be fired by the adults who own them, all these things together would make our country a much safer place. And I'm going to continue to fight for it.

We need to start by passing this legislation that the Congress has had for 8 months now. The Senate passed a pretty strong law, with the Vice President casting the tie-breaking vote. The House passed a much weaker law. And they've just been sitting on this for 8 months. I hope that these last 2 tragic days will finally move the Congress to act. And I'm going to meet with the leading conferees on the two bills in the next few days to try to do that.

**Mr. Rather.** But you're not prepared to take the step to try to regulate guns?

**The President.** I think that the most important thing we can do now is to pass the legislation before the Congress, and then try to pass legislation that would require the owners themselves, people who want to buy handguns, to be licensed, just as car drivers are. I think that's the next big step, and I think it will make a big difference.

Just with the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban and the more police on the street, we've got the murder rate down to a 30-year low. But it's still way too high. And the accidental death rate from children is as-

tronomical. It's 9 times higher than the next 24 industrial nations combined. So we've got to do more with this. And I want to focus on this agenda. I think it will drive the death rate down from guns both for murders and from accidental death rates.

### **Michigan Shooting**

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, how, if in any way, would your new proposals have prevented or even helped to prevent the shooting of this 6-year-old girl in Michigan?

**The President.** Well, I think—there are two things I'd like to mention. One is something that is still in the bill. If this gun had a child trigger lock on it, then the child, in all probability, could not have figured out how to undo the child trigger lock and fire the gun. So that's very, very important.

Then I had a provision which neither the Senate nor the House passed, to make national a law that today I think fewer than 20 States have, which would hold adults responsible for the kinds of activities that this young boy tragically engaged in when he killed that little girl. I think that it ought to be national, not just in a few States.

And so I hope the Congress, and maybe the conference, will reconsider that, even though even the Senate wouldn't pass that. They ought to take a look at this now, because clearly the adults bear the primary responsibility here. And people would think twice before just leaving a gun hanging around the house that a kid could walk off with if that were the case.

### **Gun Control Legislation**

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, there are so many questions about this issue that run so deep in the American character, as well as our history. With, as you've mentioned, at least 200 millions guns out there, what about the argument that says, listen, there's really no chance that we're going to have meaningful gun control in this country unless you go out and get those guns back, and that's simply not practical?

**The President.** Well, I think, first of all, you never want to make the perfect the enemy of the good. Look how much good

the Brady bill has done. It's kept a half million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns. And that's one of the reasons that the murder rate is at a 30-year low. So it won't solve all the problems, but it will solve some.

Secondly, especially if we could license people when they come in to buy handguns, we could then couple that with a very aggressive gun buy-back program. Keep in mind, yes, there are more than 200 million guns out there, but a lot of them are in the hands of collectors and not regularly in use. What we need to do is to get these cheap guns off the streets, and with an aggressive gun buy-back program we could do that. Just with the few million dollars we spend on it every year, we get a huge number of guns, offering about \$50 a gun.

So I would also like to see that program expanded. If you could get a lot of the older guns that are just out there floating loose off the street, if you could license the handgun owners, if you could have child safety locks, and then if we could proceed with this safe-gun technology so that in the future all the guns that were sold could only be fired by the adults who are their rightful owner, I think you'd go a long, long way toward making this a much, much safer country.

And it wouldn't in any way infringe on the rights of hunters and sport shooters, except to ask them to do what the rest of us do when we go through airport metal detectors or get driver's licenses. We undergo a little bit of inconvenience so that society as a whole would be a lot safer. And I think we have neglected this far too long.

As I said, there's not enough urgency in the Congress. You've got a dozen kids a day still getting shot to death out there. And this bill has been up there for 8 months. So this is one place where I think the United States Congress is completely out of touch with the American people, largely because of the genuine fear people have of the organized NRA interest back in their district. And they just no longer reflect the views of the majority of the people.

I had a woman tell me yesterday when I was touring a high-tech facility in northern Virginia that her husband was a Republican and an avid hunter, who strongly supported

these initiatives. And I think that's where the American people are. It's time for Congress to get in step with the American people and take these actions that will make our children safer.

### ***Gun Control and Politics***

**Mr. Rather.** Is it, or is it not, your contention, Mr. President, the basic problem has been the Republican-led Congress?

**The President.** Oh, absolutely. Now, we have some Democrats who live in rural districts where there are a lot of hunters and where they're afraid of this because when I passed the assault weapons ban and the Brady bill, back in '93 and '94, there's no question that the NRA beat about a dozen of our Members. There's no question they did. These people who voted with us to make our streets safer and save lives gave up their seats in Congress.

But public opinion has shifted a lot since then. And this is primarily a problem of the leadership in the Republican Congress being unwilling to part from the NRA. And I hope that they will do it now, because I think a lot of their Members want to. And almost all these Members of Congress could vote for this legislation and not be threatened at all, and they need to do that.

**Mr. Rather.** When I talk to the Republican leadership in Congress, they—and I will say, somewhat gleefully—say, “Look, there are at least 60 Democrats in the House who, no way, no how, are going to vote for any additional gun control legislation.”

**The President.** Well, that leaves us with about 140 on our side, which means they only have to produce 80 for us to have a majority. So they ought to do that. There's 80 Republicans who come from suburban districts where their constituents strongly support this and where they would not be defeated by the NRA if they went with us.

### ***National Rifle Association***

**Mr. Rather.** You've mentioned the NRA several times. Everybody knows the National Rifle Association pours a lot of money into a lot of campaigns to beat just this kind of legislation that you have proposed. But is it, or is it not, reality that what you have are tens of millions of Americans who own guns

and whatever their party affiliation, however they feel about you, are just adamant about not controlling guns any further, and that's the real problem?

**The President.** Well, it is, but most of them—a lot of gun owners—keep in mind, I'm convinced a majority of hunters and sport shooters, once they understand that these regulations do not in any way, shape, or form, impact their ability to conduct their lawful affairs, will support what amounts to a minor inconvenience—doing a background check at a gun show, for example, having a child safety lock on a handgun—to save lives.

And I'll say again, I know public opinion has changed. In New Hampshire, we lost a Democratic Congressman who voted for the assault weapons ban and the Brady bill. He lost his job in '94. And I went up there in '96 and met with a bunch of people who were hunters and sportsmen, and I said, "Now, the NRA told you we were going to take your guns away and inconvenience you." And I said, "If you missed a day in a deer season, I want you to vote against me, too. But if you didn't, they didn't tell you the truth, and you need to stick with us." And we won, and won handily there.

So I think people are changing as they understand this is simply commonsense safety measures, and as a society, we all undergo minor inconveniences so that our children can grow up safe. And it's ridiculous—the United States is the only country in the world that would allow this kind of, I believe, recklessness with the public interest. Nobody else does it, and that's why we have the highest murder rate and the highest accidental gun death rate of children, because we don't take these commonsense measures.

I think we ought to make this a safer country. And we can do it, I'll say again, without interfering with people's right to hunting and sport shooting.

#### **Meeting With Congressional Leaders**

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, I know you have a meeting to go to. You've been very generous with your time. A last question. So many people, when I talk to them, they say, "Look, it's fine for the President to talk this way, but he's going to see rocks grow and water run uphill before he sees any real gun

control legislation." Now, you've made it clear you don't believe that. What can you do to move this along? Can you call the Members of Congress to the White House for a special meeting to compromise? What can you do?

**Mr. President.** Yes. Well, I'm going to bring down the leaders of the House and the Senate, the Republicans and Democrats, who are in charge of this bill in the conference. The House and the Senate version are in a conference. They're supposed to come up with a unified bill and let the House and Senate vote on it. And I don't have any doubt if they report out a good bill, it will pass. And I'm going to do everything I can to pass it.

I don't believe that. They said—once they said we'd see water run uphill before we had Brady background checks. And then before we banned assault weapons. And then before we banned these large-capacity ammunition clips. We did all that, but we left some loopholes in the law that we ought to close. We ought to require child safety locks. We ought to invest in safe-gun technology. And we ought to license handgun owners.

You know, every significant reform in a controversial area is considered to be impossible when you start. But you just start, and you keep working, and you keep working, and you keep working, and eventually it happens.

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, thank you. I'd love to come by sometime and talk to you about Colombia and China and Taiwan. But I appreciate you taking time today to do this.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. President.** Thank you very much, Dan.

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, I really appreciate you taking time to do this. Great. Thanks a lot. Tell the First Lady hello for us.

**Mr. President.** I'll do it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at approximately 4:06 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room for later broadcast and was embargoed by the Office of the Press Secretary until 6:30 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI. A tape was not

available for verification of the content of this interview.

## **Remarks to the Aspen Institute in San Jose, California**

*March 3, 2000*

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much, Eric. I appreciate your kind remarks, except I don't want you telling anybody that. [*Laughter*]

I'm delighted to be here with my friend Reed Hundt, our former FCC Chairman. And President Johnson, thank you for having us here at the Aspen Institute. Senator Feinstein, thank you for coming out with me this morning, along with Congresswoman Tauscher. And I thank Representative Eshoo for coming and Representative Lofgren for welcoming us to her district.

Governor Leavitt, thank you for being here. Governor Leavitt is the leader of the Governors this year. He just spent 3 days with me in Washington. I thought he would find something else to do. If he spends any more time with me, they'll run him out of the Republican Party. [*Laughter*] However, being a Baptist, not a Mormon, I believe in deathbed conversions. You're always welcome over here. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Mayor Gonzalez for welcoming us. And I thank Mayor Menino for being here, and our former Governors, Roy Romer and Gaston Caperton and former Mayor Schmoke from Baltimore. And I thank Bill Kennard, our present FCC Chair, for coming out with me today.

### **Gun Control Legislation**

I do want to talk a little bit about the meaning of this 50th anniversary of the Aspen Institute, but because this is my only opportunity to speak to the American people through the press today, there was a late-developing event last night in the Congress I'd like to comment on, related to the gun violence and what our national response should be in the wake of the tragic shootings this week.

Over the last couple of days, I have once again asked Congress to meet and pass commonsense gun safety legislation that they've been sitting on for 8 months. Let me men-

tion, in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings, I asked the Congress to pass legislation that would provide for child trigger locks on all guns, close the loophole in the Brady law which requires background checks for guns bought at gun shops but not at gun shows or urban flea markets, and ban the importation of large capacity ammunition clips, which are now illegal under the assault weapons ban that Senator Feinstein gave us, if they're domestic. And I asked for also a national law on adult supervision responsibility if children were recklessly allowed to get guns, and that's, of course, exactly what happened in the case, the tragic case in Michigan.

Well, anyway, 8 months ago the House passed a version and the Senate passed a version. And from my point of view, the Senate bill was much better; it was much stronger, and it passed when the Vice President cast the tie-breaking vote. But for 8 months there's been no action on this legislation, so I asked for it.

Well, last night, Senator Boxer offered a nonbinding resolution that would put the Senate on record as saying we need to pass commonsense gun safety legislation now. And after all we went through this week, the resolution failed on a 49-49 tie, with 100 percent of the Democratic Senators and 10 percent of the Republican Senators voting for it, and 90 percent of the Republican Senators voted against it.

Now, this is not a partisan issue, I don't believe, anywhere but Washington, DC. Again, it's a great credit—you've got to give credit where credit is due—it's a great credit to the power of the NRA in Washington. Just this morning they said they were going to launch a \$20 million campaign to target Members of Congress who do this kind of thing, try to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children.

And right now they're running ads that treat the possibility that we could have technology to develop smart guns—that is, guns that could only be fired by their owners—as some sort of a joke. Well, I don't think it's very funny when a 6-year-old can pick up a gun and go shoot another 6-year-old, and a child safety lock would have prevented